



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION ICE PALACE
**TWO STORE CLERKS PLEAD GUILTY
TO METH INGREDIENT CHARGES**

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that two clerks employed at a Lawrence County, Mo., convenience store pleaded guilty in federal court to participating in a conspiracy to distribute ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine.

Operation Ice Palace is a long-term investigation into the illegal sale of large quantities of over-the-counter cold medications to methamphetamine manufacturers in southwest Missouri. Operation Ice Palace resulted in a series of indictments by a federal grand jury against 53 defendants.

Paul Wells, 27, and **Lori J. Williams**, 36, both of Aurora, Mo., pleaded guilty in separate appearances before U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr to participating in a conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Wells** and **Williams** were employees of Lauffer's Handi-Mart in Aurora.

Williams pleaded guilty in federal court today and **Wells** pleaded guilty in federal court on March 28, 2005.

By pleading guilty, both **Wells** and **Williams** admitted that, while working at Lauffer's Handi-Mart, they sold large amounts of pseudoephedrine to persons whom they knew were using the pseudoephedrine to manufacture methamphetamine. The most reasonably foreseeable and readily provable amount that **Wells** and **Williams** distributed or intended to distribute during the conspiracy was between 40 to 70 grams of pseudoephedrine.

On Jan. 14, 2003, **Wells** and **Williams** were in possession of 1,440 pills of 30 milligram dosage pseudoephedrine, which they intended to provide to persons whom they knew would use

it to manufacture methamphetamine.

Under federal statutes, **Wells** and **Williams** could each be subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the United States Probation Office.

Co-defendant **Larry L. Crow**, 38, of Mountain Home, Ark., pleaded guilty on March 25, 2005, to participating in a conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine, and to possessing a firearm in relation to that offense.

Crow, a sales agent for D and D Distributing, sold large amounts of pseudoephedrine to various retail stores in southwest Missouri. **Crow** was told to sell the stores 488 boxes of pseudoephedrine per month, Graves said, and to provide the stores with multiple invoices for each transaction so as to appear to conform with Drug Enforcement Administration regulations. During this time, Graves said, **Crow** sold pseudoephedrine to numerous stores that were “non-traditional” markets for pseudoephedrine, such as liquor stores, bars, laundromats and adult video stores. The most readily available amount that **Crow** was responsible for distributing was over three kilograms of pseudoephedrine. During the time of the conspiracy, Graves added, **Crow** carried a .45-caliber Ruger handgun. Under federal law, Graves explained, it is illegal to be in possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Ice Palace was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Greene County, Mo., Sheriff’s Department, the Lawrence County, Mo., Sheriff’s Department, the Ozark County, Mo., Sheriff’s Department, the Arkansas State Police, and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow